



Paint and Ink

Talking_Backwards

Paint and Ink by Talking_Backwards

Category: IT (2017), IT - Stephen King

Genre: AU, F/M, M/M, The Losers play paintball and Richie tattoos the loser, There's some swearing and mention of blood but it's not bad, also this is a few years after Pennywise, probably like 15/16 and in high school, the Barrens

Language: English

Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris, The Losers Club (IT)

Relationships: Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier, some slight Ben/Bev

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Summary:

"No, I'm not letting you tattoo me." "But you lost!"

A short fic in which Richie just wants to give someone a tattoo but no one wants to be that person.

Paint and Ink

It had all started when Richie had somehow managed to get his hands on a functioning tattoo gun and some ink and was dying to try it out on someone. No Loser was willing to let him get within five feet of them with the gun, but the group could only handle so much of Richie's continuous whining before they decided something had to be done. Someone was going to have to step up, take one for the team, and let Richie give them a tattoo. No one wanted to be that person, however, but it had to be done for the sake of all their sanities.

The Losers had decided on a little paintball competition in the Barrens to determine who would be Richie's victim. They didn't have enough paintball guns for all six of them to go at once, so they have broken it up into a three-round tournament to determine the ultimate loser. Round One and Two were similar in style: three kids go in, the first person to get hit by both people loses and advances on to the final round. The final round involves the two losers from the first two rounds, and the first one to be hit is the first customer to Richie's Tattoo Parlor. Each round had a thirty-second period for the competitors to run out somewhere within the boundaries they set in the Barrens, come up with a strategy, and prepare themselves like it's a game of hide n seek. After time was up, the round officially started.

You couldn't really watch the rounds take place, so Eddie had to anxiously sit with Bev, Ben, and Richie next to the Kenduskeag while they waited for the first round to end. Ben and Bev talked quietly to each other and Richie happily kicked his feet in the river with his tattoo gun and some ink carefully wrapped up and placed next to him. Eddie watched the trio with his aspirator in hand and wondered how they could all be acting so calm. Their lives were at the stakes of being in Richie's hands, and Richie was about to be holding someone's life in his hands!

Okay.

Maybe Eddie was being a bit dramatic due to his nerves.

But if Richie messed up, that'd be a mistake they'd have to live with

for the rest of their lives. And if the gun's needle wasn't clean it could lead to all sorts of infections and diseases. The thought alone made Eddie need to take a puff from his inhaler.

After what felt like an hour but what was probably only about five minutes, Stan, Mike, and Bill return. Almost unsurprisingly, Stan is marked by two splotches of paint while Bill and Mike remain clean. The trio of boys hand over the paint marker pistols to the Round Two group as Richie cackles looking at Stan.

"Oh man, Stan the man. I figured you were going to lose, but I didn't know it was going to be such a quick massacre!"

Stan rolls his eyes, his face a bit red from a mixture of pain from being shot by the paintballs, embarrassment from losing, and slightly angry annoyance from Richie's overall existence. "Beep beep, Richie. The game's not even over so you can't even say I've lost yet. Just you wait and see cause there's no way I'm letting you get anywhere close to me with that thing." Stan stares distastefully at the tattoo gun that Richie then quickly picks up with a gasp and cradles in mock hurt.

"That is my child you're talking about, Stan. My precious child. How dare you."

"As much as I love the family drama going on here," Bev pipes up, twirling her paint pistol. "I'd really rather hurry up and get this show on the road. I can't wait to see Richie tattoo one of you losers." Bev smiled good-heartedly in Ben, Eddie, and Stan's direction. Everyone knew Bev was the best shot, so it really was just down to the three of them to see who was going to get tattooed.

"B-B-Bev's rights, guys. Let's guh-go." Bill clapped his hands excitedly and sat down next to Richie with Mike.

"You guys remember the rules. Thirty seconds to run anywhere in the boundaries," Mike announced. "Starting... now!"

With Mike's shout, Bev, Ben, and Eddie all took off into the Barrens in different directions; Ben going downstream into the cover of the little remaining growth in the fall forest, Bev disappearing quickly inland to presumably climb some tree to gain a vantage point of the

boys and snipe them, and Eddie taking off upstream.

Due to all of them not wanting the game to take as long as it normally did for them when they played guns, the Losers had decided that everyone had to stay on the same side of the river and within a one hundred yard radius of the starting location.

Eddie headed far enough upstream that he was hopefully out of sight of everyone, and crouched down into cover before moving in an arch inland and downstream, heading around the borders of the tournament area. He tried to control his erratic heart as his mental countdown finally reached thirty, meaning that the hunt had officially begun.

Eddie moves as quickly and quietly as he could through the woods, remembering to also be looking up above him for Bev. As he zigzagged about through the Barrens, he felt himself getting just a bit more confident. He could do this! All he had to do was not get shot and he'd be safe from Richie and-

Eddie's confident thoughts about a pleasant outcome to this horrible situation were cut short by an intense rustle he heard behind him.

Whipping around and crouching low to the ground with his paint marker drawn, Eddie scanned the area for the source of the noise. Not seeing anything, Eddie slowly made his way in the direction of the sound. He had carefully only traveled about fifteen feet before he heard the snapping of a branch above him, leading to him yanking his head and hand up to fire three shots into the tree. He couldn't see anything, but he knew without a doubt that Beverly was there, and the shot to his left shoulder blade confirmed his suspicions that Ben had managed to get his way behind Eddie.

Eddie couldn't help the hiss of pain and rather loud and whiny "Ow" that escaped his mouth when Ben shot him, but he didn't let it stop him from whirling around and shooting the Ben he saw standing proudly in a bush in the abdomen. Eddie gave out a cheer, before realizing with a sinking stomach that he turned his back on Bev, who promptly hopped out of her tree onto the ground, shooting Eddie in the arm to mark him as Round Two's official loser.

The boy threw his head back and groaned. "Oh, come on. You guys totally planned this, didn't you! You both made a plan to trap me on both ends and take me out together, didn't you?" Eddie looked accusingly at the smiling pair.

Bev laughed. "My my, Eddie. Those are some awfully serious accusations you're throwing out there."

"Yeah, Eddie." Ben huffed. "Prove it."

Eddie rolled his eyes as the trio made their way back to Kenduskeag. "Oh please. You two are always making those disgusting googly eyes at each other all the time. You're practically a couple without the title. Of course, you'd team up together against me"

Ben blushed deeply and look away as Bev's face become brushed with pink cheeks. Ben tried to stutter an excuse, but it was cut off as they arrived back to the starting point.

Upon seeing Eddie's stained shirt, Richie dramatically approached and flopped into the boy's arms and turned on his southern bell's Voice. "Oh my, Eddie. What ever on earth happened to you? You're all bloody and torn. Just wait until Papa hears about this. Papa? Oh, Papa...?"

Eddie sighed and dumped Richie out of his arms onto the ground. "Stop being so dramatic, Richie, it was just a paintball."

Richie gave a dramatic gasp from where he laid on the ground, glancing up at Eddie through his absurd coke-bottle glasses. "Well, that was rude, Eds."

Rolling his eyes, Eddie lightly kicked the boy on the ground in his hip. "Stop calling me that."

"Well, as much fun as this is, I'd really rather we hurry up and finish this," Stan spoke up from where he sat, examining his nails to make sure they looked nice as they usually did.

"Stan's right. Come on, you two. Let's go." Mike cheered Eddie and Stan on.

Ben handed his pistol over to Stan, and he and Eddie sprinted off in different directions into the woods as soon as “GO!” was shouted.

Eddie headed off into the woods instead of following the river, making sure to take note of what direction Stan had taken off in before ducking into the forest. He jogged out, trying to judge how close he was to the nonexistent border of the game’s boundaries. Following his old plan, that hadn’t actually worked well the first time, Eddie decided to try and follow the boundary up to where Stan had headed off. Whispering to himself, Eddie had finally reached thirty, right when Stan shot him.

The boy whirled around to face Stan, grabbing his hit side. “Wha-? Stan!”

Stan stared at him blankly. “What? It’s been thirty seconds.”

Eddie couldn’t help but stare at him in disbelief. “Did you follow me?”

“Well, yeah.” He shrugged. “Although ‘following you’ may be a bit of a stretch. You have predictable habits when it comes to guns. You always try to go around the border, so I knew where you were going to be, and after leading you on a bit of a goose chase, I turned around and went back after you.”

Slumping his shoulders and throwing his head back, Eddie let out a groan of annoyance. “Well, shit.” He should have known Stan was going to outsmart him. He was very observant, and it was dumb of Eddie to not check behind him just because it was a safe period.

Stan led them back the way they came, Eddie trailing behind a bit in defeat and disbelief. He knew someone was going to have to lose, but he didn’t realize it was going to be him. He at least hoped he would have lasted a bit longer instead of losing almost right away both rounds.

Reaching the Kenduskeag, Eddie felt the realization of just what exactly was going to happen hit him full force: He had agreed to let Richie permanently stain his body with any image of his choosing. It was probably going to be something vastly inappropriate. What

would his mom say if she saw? What if Richie purposefully put something he wanted his mom to see somewhere she would see it? He wouldn't put it past him. Eddie felt light headed.

The Losers, sans Eddie, cheered as Richie pridefully presented the gun. Everyone was excited to see Richie tattoo someone now that they knew it wasn't going to be them.

"W-W-What are you gonna ta-tattoo, Rih-Richie?" Bill said with a smile as he looked over at Richie who walked around Eddie, examining him.

"Hmmm." Richie tapped his chin thoughtfully. "I didn't think this far ahead exactly. It has to be... personal." The boy smirked.

"Nope. Nu-huh. No" Eddie shook his head. "I'm not letting you tattoo me."

"But you lost!" Mike let out.

"Yeah, Eddie, you can't back out of a bet last second like a chicken," Bev added. "We all agreed."

"Too late for take-backsies, my sweet Eds." Richie set a hand on Eddie's face as he looked into his eyes with mock seriousness. "You know this has to be done."

Every part of Eddie's being wanted to protest this. He briefly thought about running before dismissing it completely. Even if he could outrun the six of them, Eddie at least had some dignity to his name. He sighed. "Fine. But it has to be small and somewhere that can be easily covered. My mom will kill every single one of us if she finds out."

The Losers cheered again and Richie grabbed Eddie's shoulders, shaking him. "You won't regret this. I promise!"

"I better not." Eddie sat himself down on a rock next to the river and Richie crouched down next to him.

"Alright! Look alive folks! I need ideas here, people. Hit me!" Richie pointed to Bill.

“You could do a d-d-dick.” He shrugged, clearly not impressed by the idea himself.

Richie waved his hand. “Too unoriginal. Next!”

“You could do a picture of the Barrens or Kenduskeag to commemorate Eddie’s greatest loss that he experienced here today.” Bev offered.

“Too complicated. We’re talking about bare minimum when it comes to art skills here. Gotta keep it simple. What else we got?”

“We could-” Stan started before Richie gave out a shout to cut him off.

“Shut up! I know what to do now!” Richie flipped the switch of the tattoo gun on and it came alive in his hands with a buzz. “We can do it on your bicep so a standard tee shirt or longer will hide it. Easy.”

Eddie watched the whirling gun for a moment before giving his head a slight nod. “Okay, fine. But sketch it out first! I don’t want you trying to produce some shitty tattoo with your awful on the spot free handing. Just because it’s coming from you doesn’t mean it can’t look a bit nice.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Trashmouth is trash, we get it.” Richie pulled a pen out of his back pocket and pulled the cap off with his teeth, spitting it onto the ground. This man was always walking around with the weirdest things on him. He rolled the sleeve of Eddie’s shirt up slightly. “Now look away. I want it to be a surprise.”

“Uh, no. I don’t trust you.”

“You no longer have a choice. You have signed all your rights over to me for the next twenty minutes involving the skin of your bicep right above your elbow and how it looks.” Richie traced out a circle with the butt of his pen on Eddie’s arm. “And you should trust me. I promise I won’t do anything too bad.” He winked.

Eddie looked intensely at Richie for a moment, trying to figure out what he was up to. Eddie should have known that after years of experience, there was no way to ever figure out what Richie was

going to do. Hell, even Richie always seemed surprised by what he does on occasion. The only thing Eddie could read off of Richie's face at this moment, however, was that Richie was being truthful, so despite his better judgment, Eddie closed his eyes and faced the opposite direction. "Fine. Just get it over with."

He heard someone, probably Ben, give out a whoop of excitement and felt Richie begin to lightly trace out something on Eddie's arm, about an inch or two above his elbow.

Richie was oddly quiet while he worked. Gripping Eddie's arm lightly, he carefully drew out the design on his arm. The other Losers gathered around behind Richie to look over his shoulder to see what he was drawing, but Pancho Vanilla quickly shooed them away, telling them they too had to wait to see, señors and señorita.

Once Richie had the sketch finished to a degree of his liking, having to carefully lick his thumb a bit to wipe away any bad or stray marks, he picked back up his gun, making sure the ink in it was black. He only currently owned only a few colors of ink, but luckily for him, he had at least grabbed the two he needed for this when he ran off this morning.

"Okay, I'm going to start tattooing. It may hurt a bit, but try not to move too much or you might mess it up." Richie spoke softly to Eddie in a tone that was almost a little too unnaturally caring for Richie.

Eddie gave a nod of understanding, too overwhelmed to say anything back in response. Richie carefully set the tip of the needle against the first line of the design and Eddie let out a small, involuntary hiss at the pain. Richie hesitated for a moment, but Eddie said nothing else, so he continued to carefully trace the line.

Eddie kept his eyes shut tightly, and his fists pressed painfully against his legs as Richie worked. After a minute or two, Eddie got used to the slight pain of the buzzing gun and began to loosen up his body slowly. Everyone was dead silent, the only noise being the sound of Richie's tattoo gun and the rush of the Kenduskeag as everyone waited for Richie to finish up.

It probably only took Richie twenty minutes to complete the small

and simple tattoo, but to everyone there, it felt like hours. Eddie even had to admit that he felt rather relaxed after a bit and began to lose track of passing time. The needle stung slightly as Richie worked, but his presence so close Eddie's own was so oddly... comforting. He felt safe with the feeling of Richie's hand on his arm, holding Eddie still while he finished up lines. He almost let out a complaint when Richie let go of him to switch out ink colors.

A few minutes after Richie had switched the colors, replacing black with red, the boy sat back with a huff, switched the gun off, and announced that he was done.

Eddie hesitantly opened his eyes a crack and glanced down at his arm, nervous. There was a bit of blood lining the design from where he had been poked with the needle, but Richie carefully wiped it away with a piece of cloth from his pocket. The cloth was probably on him to clean his glasses with, but everyone knew Richie never did that, so it was a bit bizarre to see that he still had it on him. What was even more bizarre though, was seeing the design Richie had left on his arm.

Written in bold, black capital letters, was the word "LOSER," with a red "V" written over the "S" in the word.

Eddie stared at the design in bewilderment, wondering just where exactly the fuck on Earth Richie had come up with such an idea, when a dusty memory, long forgotten, appeared in Eddie's mind. It was the summer a few years ago, the year all seven of them had come together as friends. He couldn't remember specifics, but he saw Bill, Richie, and himself at Neibolt house, him falling through the second story floor, Richie snapping his arm in place, his mom scolding him during their wait in the emergency room, Greta Bowie's annoyed and condescending face as she wrote on his cast, tears streaming down his face silently as he left the drug store in shame with the word "LOSER" written on his cast, grabbing a red marker when he got home, a "V" scribbled over the "S," and the thoughtful look on Richie's face a month later when the two of them stood hand in hand with slit palms and swore to...do something? He couldn't remember what, but it was something important. It's funny that Eddie had forgotten about that. He usually had a pretty good memory, but it's almost like that entire summer had been wiped from his mind except

for the few snapshots of moments that just came tumbling back to him, and felt like they were already starting to fade from his mind yet again.

Eddie carefully ran his finger under the word as the other Losers crowded in to finally see Richie's tattoo idea. Eddie saw his own initial look of confusion evident on each of their faces as they looked at the word.

"Didn't you used to have something that had that same design, Eddie?" Bev asked as she examined the tattoo, the memory clearly there but just a fingertip length out of her reach.

"No, Eddie didn't have something like that," Stan stated, just as confused as different glimpses of memory brush his mind. "Or, he did, but didn't write it, right?"

"I-I-I th-think you're b-b-both right. And wr-wrong." Bill shook his head, mystified.

Ben glanced at Richie. "Where did this come from? Why is it so familiar?"

Richie stuck his bottom lips out, a trait of his he did when deep in contemplation (a rare thing to witness), and shrugged. "I'm not totally sure. It just suddenly came to me. I just remembered standing somewhere here in the Barrens, looking at that written on Eddie's arm, and thinking to myself, 'Wow, what a peculiar thing.' It just felt fitting to tattoo it."

The other Losers slowly gave signs of agreement, though still not totally sure why they were all on this same, unknown page. Eddie pulled his eyes away from the tattoo, out of context images still flashing by in his mind making him feel closer to understanding something but ultimately more confused than ever, and opened up his fanny pack to grab something to put over the fresh tattoo. Ever since a few years ago, in what he felt like was the same summer of the origins of his tattoo, Eddie had stopped carrying all that useless medicine around with him, and tried to keep more practical things in his pack like first aid supplies. He still had his aspirator with him, even though he knew it was fake because sometimes a puff from it

still helped calm him down when his anxiety was acting up.

Eddie carefully placed a bandage over the tattoo once everyone had looked at it enough, and looked down at his feet with a sigh. "It feels weird having this on my arm. I know it should be meaningful, but I don't know why. This is like, the very definition of getting a tattoo you regret and I only got this two minutes ago. Though not voluntarily anyways..."

"Well, I think it looks pretty cool." Ben offered.

"Yeah, it's sort of like your own Losers Club logo," Mike said with a nod and friendly smile towards Eddie.

"Yeah," Stan Smirked. "Richie surprisingly wasn't complete shit with his first tattoo."

Richie waved his hand dismissively and laughed. "Oh please. You all knew I had the magic within me all along.

"S-Sure we d-did, Rich."

The group slowly started to get back into chatting and bickering with each other, the weird memories around Eddie's tattoo having disappeared from their minds as quickly as they had come. Eddie stayed quiet for a moment longer, looking at the white patch over the new, permanent part of his being as he tried to rack his brain for any more information surrounding its origins. Part of him felt like no matter how hard he tried, he never would remember what it had all meant. He didn't remember what he was doing in Neibolt house, how he managed to be so careless as to fall through the floor, why he had written the "V" over the "S," and why Richie had cared so much about the writing on his cast. The majority of Eddie though was more than fine with never remembering it all. He wasn't sure why he felt this way, but he did. It was just probably for the best.

Eddie got up and gave Richie a small kiss on the cheek before wrapping his arms around him in a hug. "Thanks, Richie."

"Of course, Eds." Richie patted Eddie's head affectionately, trying to ignore the shared warmth in their faces. "Anytime."

“... Don’t call me Eds.”

“Whatever you say, Eds.”

Author's Note:

I'm not totally sure what's goin' on here, but here this story no one asked for is. Feel free to leave a comment with any questions, concerns, confusion, feedback, etc., or just any type of comment if you want. All are welcomed and appreciated.

You can also hit me up at <https://winter-fire-january-embers.tumblr.com/> if you want.

Thanks for reading!